

## ***THE OBSESSION WITH A THEME: "LÀ CI DAREM LA MANO" BY MOZART***

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"The opera of all operas", *Don Giovanni* K. 527, with the complete title *Il dissoluto punito, ossia il Don Giovanni*, is perhaps the most dramatic and fascinating music composed by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Based on Lorenzo Da Ponte's libretto, the premiere of Mozart's opera was held not in Vienna, his city of residence in 1781, but at the Nosticiz Theatre (today: Stavovské divadlo) in Prague, on October 28, 1787. Just as "nobody is a prophet in their own land", the public of Prague received the masterpiece with tremendous enthusiasm. The local press, *Prager Oberamtszeitung*, appreciated the genuineness of the event with the following words: "Connoisseurs and musicians say that Prague has never heard the like", whereas regarding the complexity of the score, the author of the article added: "the opera [...] is extremely difficult to perform". *The Provincialnachrichten of Vienna* wrote about the performance that "Herr Mozart conducted in person and was welcomed joyously and jubilantly by the numerous gathering". Despite this obvious triumph (or perhaps because of it), the Viennese premiere was delayed by half a year, until May 7, 1788, so as to enable Mozart to prepare it thoroughly.

Vienna had long ceased to be loyal to the hero that it had so widely acclaimed in the summer of 1782, on the premiere of his opera *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. After the performance in Vienna, there was a remark in a circle of acquaintances about *Don Giovanni* to the effect that: "everyone admitted it was the valuable work of a versatile genius and was of endless imagination", but the praises were soon followed by criticism. Haydn, although present, remained silent until he was asked for his opinion, when he reacted in his own particular manner: "I cannot give a judgment, gentlemen, upon all these objections you have started: all I know is that Mozart

is certainly the greatest composer now existing". Already in 1782, Mozart showed his appreciation for these words of praise, by dedicating the six quartets to Haydn. To another Viennese critic, Mozart declared that "if you and I were both melted down together, we should not furnish materials for one Haydn"<sup>48</sup>. It seems that to Mozart, Haydn represented the moral and musical ideal.

Leopold Mozart died on May 28, 1787, and five months later, on October 29, took place the premiere of *Don Giovanni*. The overture, composed during the night preceding the premiere, is written in D minor, which makes it Mozart's only opera beginning in a minor key, although Mozart had noted it as an *opera buffa*. At the same time, an opera beginning with an attempted rape and a duel ending with a murder has the impact of a Greek or Shakespearean tragedy. Could this part have been dedicated to his father, the esteemed and feared Leopold? Possibly, Donna Anna's grief over the mysterious murder of her father also impressed Wolfgang Amadeus, the "prodigal son", deprived of his only support in a Vienna that was becoming more and more hostile. His tremendous success in Prague, and then the more temperate one in Vienna, came as a consolation and also as an impetus for his following stage masterpieces: *Così fan tutte*, *Clemenza di Tito* and *The Magic Flute*. The Viennese premiere of the opera *Don Giovanni* also occasioned Mozart's meeting with the two sopranos who marked his life: Aloysia Weber and Catarina Cavalieri. Aloysia was the woman he had hopelessly fallen in love with nine years before (1778), during that fatal tour when he also lost his mother. As to Catarina Cavaglieri, she helped him reach the peaks of glory at the premiere of the opera *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, on July 16, 1782.

The Spanish hero Don Juan was created by Tirso de Molina<sup>49</sup> in 1630, in the pages of the tragic drama *The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest*. The chronicles of Seville indicate that there also existed a real hero, contemporary with the fictional one, by the name of Don Juan Tenorio y Salazar, count of Mañara (1626-1679).

### **Mozart's meeting with Lorenzo da Ponte**

1787. The most famous version comes from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart after Lorenzo da Ponte's libretto<sup>50</sup>, at whose premiere it is assumed that Giacomo Casanova himself was present in the audience. The meeting between Da Ponte and Mozart was recorded in a letter addressed by the composer to his father, dated Vienna, May 7, 1783: "...The Italian opera buffa has recommenced

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<sup>48</sup> Stendhal, *Viețile lui Haydn, Mozart și Metastasio*, Editura Muzicală a Uniunii Compozitorilor, București, 1974.

<sup>49</sup> Tirso de Molina (1584-1648), originally Gabriel Téllez, illegitimate son of a duke, theologian and writer.

<sup>50</sup> Lorenzo da Ponte (b. March 10, 1749 – d. August 17, 1838) was a Venetian opera librettist and poet. He wrote the librettos for 28 operas by 11 composers, including Mozart.

here, and is very popular. I have looked through a hundred libretti, and more, but have not been able to find even one with which I am satisfied... A certain Abbate da Ponte is our poet here. He has an enormous amount to do in revising pieces for the theatre and he has to write per obbligo an entirely new libretto for Salieri, which will take him two months. He has promised after that to write a new libretto for me. But who knows whether he will be able to keep his word - or will want to? For, as you are aware, these Italian gentlemen are very civil to your face. Enough, we know them! If he is in league with Salieri, I shall never get anything out of him! But indeed I should dearly love to show what I can do in an Italian opera!" Mozart's fears were assuaged by the talented librettist, and their cooperation gave life to masterpieces like: *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, *Così fan tutte*. It is true that before the *Don Giovanni*' premiere in Prague, da Ponte was ordered back to Vienna to stage Salieri's *Axur*.

**Giacomo Girolamo Casanova de Seingalt** (1725-1798) was an Italian adventurer from Venice, whose notorious gallantries are evoked in his *Memoires (The Story of My Life)* written between 1791 and 1798, a brilliant illustration of his adventurous life, experiences and convictions, as well as a scintillating portrait of an epoch. His father was an actor and play director, and his mother was an actress. He began his studies with Abbé Gozzi, who tutored him in academic subjects as well as the violin. At the age of 12 he entered the University of Padua and graduated five years later with a degree in civil and canon law. He studied philosophy, chemistry, mathematics, and was keenly interested in medicine, which he practiced only for his friends. He was also an addicted gambler, which often threw him into financial difficulties. Back in Venice, he polished himself up in the palace of his protector, senator Gasparo Malipiero, started his clerical law career and became an abbot. He fell into disgrace, entered the military career, joined the Venetian regiment at Corfu and then eventually gave it up. Gambling and debts continued to complicate his life. Back to Venice again, he lived like a dandy, left for Paris in 1750, then for Lyon, where he entered the society of Freemasonry, and launched the rumour that he knew the secret of the philosopher's stone. He was imprisoned in the Doge's palace for five years, from where he made a daring escape, although according to some sources he was helped out by a senator. The reason: the senator was grateful to Casanova who had saved his life by changing his treatment plan. He claimed to be a Rosicrucian and an alchemist, and visited Voltaire. He wandered through the great European cities of Cologne, Stuttgart, Marseille, Genoa, Florence, Rome, Naples, Modena, Turin, then England and Moscow, winning great fame as a conqueror and leaving behind only debts.

He spent his last years of life in Bohemia, as a librarian to count Karl von Waldstein, at the Duchcov (Dux) Castle. It is there that he met his compatriot Lorenzo da Ponte, whom, according to his memoirs, he helped in drawing the portrait of Don Giovanni, his character.

Da Ponte's libretto was conceived, as customary in those times, as a *drama giocoso*, a term denoting a combination of serious and comic action. Mozart actually entered the work into his catalogue as an "opera buffa". Although sometimes classified as a comedy, it combines comic, melodramatic and supernatural elements.

Then the Romantic variants followed: Byron wrote the epic poem *Don Juan* (1821), being followed by Pushkin (1830), Musset (1832), José de Espronceda (1840), José Zorilla (1844) and Bernard Shaw – a four-act drama (1903). The theme was set to music by Gluck, Delibes, Alfano, Dargomĭjsky, culminating with R. Strauss' symphonic poem (1887) based on a poem by Nikolaus Lenau (1844).

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard wrote a long essay in his book *Enten – Eller (Either – Or)*, in which he quotes Charles Gounod as saying that Mozart's Don Giovanni "is a work without blemish, of uninterrupted perfection". There is a multitude of modern approaches, such as that of the playwright George Bernard Shaw, who in *Man and Superman* parodies the end of the opera, i.e. the scene with the Commander and Don Giovanni and the refusal of the latter to repent himself.

### **1787 – the year of the meeting between Beethoven and Mozart**

Neefe, Beethoven's teacher, persuaded the Prince Elector that the young man should go to Vienna to take lessons from Mozart, but after a few weeks, the illness and death of his mother brought him back to Bonn. The lack of documents makes it impossible to give a precise estimate of the date and time they spent together, but Beethoven is assumed to have studied with Mozart during the two weeks spent in Vienna. His veneration for the maestro and his regret for his death can be deeply felt in his works. But Beethoven was far from being the only one who was fascinated with Mozart's music. Here are the most representative pieces inspired by the Mozartian themes:

- 1792-3 – Beethoven: "Se vuol ballare" (*The Marriage of Figaro*) – for piano and violin;
- 1795 – Beethoven: "Là ci darem la mano" (*Don Giovanni*) – for 2 oboes and English horn;
- 1795 – Beethoven: "Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen" (*The Magic Flute*) op. 66 – for piano and cello;
- 1795 – Beethoven: "Bei Männern welche Liebe" (*The Magic Flute*) – for piano and cello;
- 1796 – Beethoven: Zerlina's aria "Batti, batti" (*Don Giovanni*) – for quintet (oboe, clarinet, horn, bassoon) with piano and winds, op. 16, *Andante*;
- 1819-23 – Beethoven: *Allegro molto alla "Notte e giorno faticar"* (*Don Giovanni*), 33 variations on a theme by Diabelli, for piano, op. 120;

1827 – Chopin: "*Là ci darem la mano*". *Varié, avec accompagnement d'Orchestre*, op. 2 – for piano and orchestra;

1841 – Liszt: *Réminiscences de Don Juan* by Mozart "*Là ci darem la mano*", "*Fin c'al da vino*" – for piano and orchestra;

1887 – Tchaikovsky: *Mozartiana*, the subtitle of the *Suite No.4 for Orchestra*, in 4 movements, comprises Mozartian themes from different works:

1. *Gigue for piano*, K574, 2. *Minuet for piano*, K355, 3. *Ave verum corpus*, K618, orchestrated by Liszt, 4. *Variations for piano on the theme "Unser dummer Pöbel meint"* from Gluck, *La rencontre imprévue*, K455.

1914 – Max Reger: *Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Mozart* op. 132 (sonata in A Major K. 331);

1969 – Cornel Țăranu: the opera *The Secret of Don Giovanni*;

2006 – Ede Terényi: *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra "Tribute for Mozart"*, composed for Mozart's anniversary year.

### **1787 Mozart: *Don Giovanni*, duettino "*Là ci darem la mano*"**

Back to the opera *Don Giovanni*, we propose a selection of three instrumental works inspired by Mozart's sensuous *Duettino* and written by Beethoven, Chopin and Liszt at the ages of 25, 17 and 30, ages when the hero's fascinating and demonic personality shaped by the tandem of genius Mozart – Da Ponte represented an ideal.

1795 – Beethoven: "*Là ci darem la mano*" (*Don Giovanni*) – for 2 oboes and English horn;

1827 – Chopin: "*Là ci darem la mano*". *Varié, avec accompagnement d'Orchestre*, op. 2;

1841 – Liszt: *Réminiscences de Don Juan* by Mozart "*Là ci darem la mano*", "*Fin c'al da vino*".

Romanticism had a predilection toward paraphrasing themes belonging to forerunners of the likes of **Camille Saint-Saëns**, with the *10 Variations on a Theme by Beethoven* Op. 35 for two pianos (with the theme being taken from the *Sonata Op. 31 No. 3*) and **Johannes Brahms**, author of the *24 Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Händel* Op. 24 for piano, and of the *Variations on a Theme by Haydn (St Anthony Chorale)*, a work written in two variants, one for *two pianos* and the other for orchestra<sup>51</sup>. These works are seen as a good preparation for the *1st Symphony*.

In *Don Giovanni*, the duet "*Là ci darem la mano*" takes place in act I, upon the hero's escape from three trials: his failed attempt to seduce Donna Anna, the duel with and killing of her father, the Commander, and the disastrous meeting with Donna Elvira. After her departure, Don

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<sup>51</sup> The piece comprises a theme, eight variations and a passacaglia.

Giovanni comes across a group of peasants celebrating the wedding of Masetto and Zerlina. Don Giovanni tries to seduce Zerlina and, with Leporello's help, attempts to remove the wedding guests and the jealous husband, who was already suspicious of Don Giovanni's plans (Masetto's aria *Ho capito! Signor, sì*). Alone with Zerlina, Don Giovanni applies his charm:

<p>DON GIOVANNI Là ci darem la mano, là mi dirai di sì. Vedi, non è lontano partiam, ben mio, da qui.</p>	<p>DON GIOVANNI There we'll be hand in hand, dear, There you will say "I do"; Look, it is right at hand, dear, Let's go from here, me and you.</p>
<p>ZERLINA Vorrei e non vorrei mi trema un poco il cor. Felice, è ver, sarei, ma può burlarmi ancor.</p>	<p>ZERLINA I want to, but it's not pure, My heart is ill at ease. I would be happy, I'm sure, But it may all be a tease.</p>
<p>DON GIOVANNI Vieni, mio bel diletto!</p>	<p>DON GIOVANNI Come, sweetest love, let's hurry!</p>
<p>ZERLINA Mi fa pietà Masetto!</p>	<p>ZERLINA Masetto gives me worry!</p>
<p>DON GIOVANNI io cangerò tua sorte.</p>	<p>DON GIOVANNI I'll change your life forever.</p>
<p>ZERLINA Presto, non son più forte!</p>	<p>ZERLINA Soon, dear I don't feel clever!</p>
<p>DON GIOVANNI Vieni, vieni.</p>	<p>DON GIOVANNI Let's go!</p>
<p>DON GIOVANNI, ZERLINA Andiam, andiam, mio bene, a ristorar le pene d'un innocente amor!</p>	<p>DON GIOVANNI, ZERLINA Let's go, my love, let's go, To heal the pain and woe Of love that's innocent!</p>

Mozart – *Don Giovanni*, act I, No. 7 Duettino

*Andante*

The statement of Don Giovanni's theme in a serene A Major and in a determined and ascending *Andante*, fits perfectly in the classical quadrature; Zerlina's hesitating answer, her vacillation between an "innocent" love and her faithfulness to Masetto, break the initial symmetry and triggers the hero's pertinacity:

Ex. nr. 1 Mozart:

The image displays a page of a musical score for Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Act I, No. 7 Duettino. The score is in A major, 2/4 time, and marked *Andante*. It features Don Giovanni and Zerlina. The score includes parts for Flauto, Oboi, Fagotti, Corni in A, Violino I and II, Viola, Don Giovanni (with lyrics), Violoncello, Contrabasso, Fl. (Flauto piccolo), Ob. (Oboe piccolo), Fag. (Fagotto piccolo), Cor. in A (Corni in A piccolo), Viol. (Violini piccolo), Viola (Viola piccolo), Zerlina (with lyrics), D.G. (Don Giovanni piccolo), Vc. (Violoncello piccolo), and Cb. (Contrabasso piccolo). The score shows the initial statement of Don Giovanni's theme and Zerlina's response.

A: (a+a<sub>1</sub>) 18 bars, A major, 2/4; a: D.G. 8 bars (4+4); a<sub>1</sub>: Z. 10 bars (4+6);

In the middle part (B), Don Giovanni is stepping up the siege, in the key of the dominant (E major): the couple's lines follow one another at a brisk pace (in every other bar, twice as fast as in the first stanza), with Zerlina's motivic enlargements and the young man's more and more persistent stretto. The thematic and tonal reprise (in A major), with the overlapping of the two ideas (seduction and vacillation) culminates in a duet of the triumphant love, an impressive 33-bar coda (C), in a dancing ternary meter, ending in the mocking accompaniment of the orchestra:

**Ex. nr. 2 Mozart:**

B: E major 2/4;(b+a<sub>v</sub>+b<sub>v</sub>) 31;

b: D.G. - Z. b E major 11 bars (4+7); a<sub>1</sub> A major: 10/11 (4+6/7) stretto CODA 10 extension bars Z. +2 extension bars D.G.) chromatic line (indecision, procrastination); A major a<sub>v</sub>: D.G. - Z. stretto 10/11 (4+8) bars; b<sub>1v</sub>: stretto (4+3+3);

C (c+c<sub>1</sub>+Coda) 33 bars: A major 6/8;

In our days, the charm of the *duettino* has conquered the audiences worldwide and has been included in the concert repertoires. There are countless recordings with famous baritones and sopranos, even tenors like Luciano Pavarotti or Plácido Domingo, who have played this part with predilection.

**1795 – Beethoven, *Variationen über das thema "Là ci darem la mano"* - "Reich' mir die Hand, mein Leben!" aus Mozarts "Don Juan" – for 2 oboes and English horn in C major**

Beethoven gained his first successes as a virtuoso playing in private salons. There was no concert season or music-loving audience in Vienna at that time, as there were in England or Paris, except for a few benefit concerts or subscription concerts for young solo virtuosos. Beethoven had a strong impact on the Viennese audience as a virtuosic pianist and improviser, as can be seen from the reconciliation letter addressed to Eleonore von Breuning in Bonn. The letter was meant to excuse Beethoven's almost one year silence while in Vienna and was accompanied by his first opus, partly composed in Bonn: the variation for violin and piano on the theme „Se vuol ballare” by Mozart; at the end of the letter, he alludes to the difficult trills in the CODA, confessing that:

"I never would have written it in this way, had I not occasionally observed that there was a certain individual in Vienna who, when I extemporized the previous evening, not infrequently wrote down next day many of the peculiarities of my music, adopting them as his own. Concluding, therefore, that some of these things would soon appear, I resolved to anticipate this. Another reason also was to puzzle some of the pianoforte teachers here, many of whom are my mortal foes. So I wished to revenge myself on them in this way, knowing that they would occasionally be asked to play the variations, when these gentlemen would not appear to much advantage"<sup>52</sup>

On March 29, 1795, in Burgtheater, Beethoven appeared in a twofold position: as a composer and a virtuoso, performing his own concerto, probably the one in B-flat Major, later published as his second concerto, Op.19. 19. According to the confession of Franz Gerhard Wegeler, his friend from Bonn who, while in Vienna for a longer time (October 1794 – the summer of 1796), witnessed the preparations for this concert (or perhaps for the concert of two months later, i.e. December, and the concert performed may have been the first one, Op. 15, in C major), Beethoven completed the finale only in the last moment, claiming abdominal pains.

The next day, at the second benefit concert, Beethoven appeared again on the stage with a program of improvisations. On March 31, Constanze, Mozart's widow, organized the staging of the opera *La clemenza di Tito*; on this occasion, Beethoven performed three times during the three-day manifestations, playing one of Mozart's concertos. Toward the end of the year (the exact date is unknown), Beethoven visited Prague and gave two public concerts and an author recital. The details were provided by the Bohemian composer Václav Tomášek: *Adagio and Rondo* from his *Sonata for Piano in A major, Op. 2 No. 2*, improvisations on "Ah perdona" from *Clemenza di*

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<sup>52</sup> *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Macmillan Publishers Ltd., London, 1992, p. 78.

*Tito* and "Ah vous dirai-je maman" by Mozart, and his first two concertos, in B flat major and C major. To Tomášek, a true connoisseur of all the instrument virtuosos from Mozart until 1840, Beethoven remained the greatest pianist.

*The Variations on the theme "Là ci darem la mano"* in C major, for two oboes and English horn, are among the many works that the young composer wrote on his return to Vienna, which later were published without an opus number. The work demonstrates Beethoven's preoccupation at that time with the study of counterpoint with Joseph Haydn and Johann Albrechtsberger.

Beethoven's reply brings a compression of the *Duetto*, by balancing the discourse and removing the ternary Coda from the enunciation of the theme. The ternary Coda will thus appear only at the end of the last variation (the 8th), in a polyphonic texture and at a staggering *Vivace* tempo, ending subtly in Mozart's original tempo, *Andante - pianissimo*.

**Ex. nr. 1 Beethoven:**

The image displays the musical score for the first variation of the theme "Là ci darem la mano" by Beethoven. The score is written for three instruments: Oboe I, Oboe II, and English Horn. The tempo is marked "Andante". The key signature is C major, and the time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into four systems. The first system shows the initial entry of the theme with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The subsequent systems show the development of the theme with various dynamics including mezzo-forte (*mf*), mezzo-piano (*mp*), pianissimo (*pp*), and forte (*f*). The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Theme. *Andante* A *piano*; B *mf* <*f*; a<sub>v</sub> *piano*>*pp*

A: 8 bars (a +a<sub>1</sub>) - C major Don Giovanni (4+4);

B: 11 bars (b+ b<sub>1</sub>) - G major b. DG + Z (2+2); b<sub>1</sub> DG (2b) + Z(3b) + DG (2b);

a<sub>v</sub>: 6 bars (2+2+2) C major;

- The theme: is played by the 1<sup>st</sup> oboe, accompanied by the 2<sup>nd</sup> oboe and by the English horn;

- the compression of the last part replaces the CODA in 6/8;

Var. I (*Allegretto*), the theme in dotted rhythm appears in the 1<sup>st</sup> oboe part, while the accompaniment is performed by the 2<sup>nd</sup> oboe and the English horn;

Var. II (*L'istesso tempo*) the theme returns to the cantabile style in the 2<sup>nd</sup> oboe part, followed by the 1<sup>st</sup> oboe, and the novelty appears in the English horn part, which displays a figuration in sixteenth-note triplets;

Var. III (*Andante*) – the more free theme, with ornaments and chromaticizations, is in the 1<sup>st</sup> oboe part;

Var. IV (*Allegro moderato*) – polyphonic, imitative (*fugato*) treatment of the theme, with chromatic elements and a culmination (*forte*) in the end;

Var. V (*Moderato*) – the theme in the 1<sup>st</sup> oboe part, in a virtuosic melodic variation in 32<sup>nd</sup> notes;

Var. VI (*Lento espressivo*) – C minor: lyrical passage, with ornaments and chromatic elements in the theme performed by the English horn, continued in B by the 1<sup>st</sup> oboe;

Var. VII (*Allegretto scherzando*) – the major key (C major) returns, an ingenious hoquetus in the dialogue between the 2<sup>nd</sup> oboe and the English horn – with the 1<sup>st</sup> oboe entering four bars later, the voices' race in counterpoint being interrupted only by a *respiro* effect (a general pause bar) before the end in *fortissimo*;

Var. VIII (*Allegretto giocoso*) – a brilliant end, with the thematic statement in the English horn part - in dialogue with the 1<sup>st</sup> oboe (entering after three bars), against the Alberti figuration in 32<sup>nd</sup> notes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> oboe; the attacca subito da Coda (*Vivace*) follows in polyphonic 6/8 (33 bars and an ample 10 bar cadence) and a meditative thematic closing in *Andante* 2/4 time (13 bars): the final theme is played by the 2<sup>nd</sup> oboe, doubled in discant by the 1<sup>st</sup> oboe at the third, and after a dialogue with the English horn, everything fades away in a mysterious *pianissimo*.

During his rising years, Beethoven created a vigorous piece, i.e. the *Variations* "La ci darem la mano", performed today by the best oboe ensembles worldwide.

## 1827 – Chopin: "*Là ci darem la mano*". *Varié, avec accompagnement d'Orchestre*, op. 2

Chopin opened the series of concerts for piano and orchestra with the *Variations in B flat Major on the theme of the duet "La ci darem"* from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, followed, one year later, by the *Fantasy on Polish Airs, Rondo à la Krakowiak, Concerto No. 2* (1829), *Concerto No. 1* (1930) and *Grande Polonaise Brillante in E-Flat Major* (1830-35).<sup>53</sup>

The *Variations on a Theme by Mozart* were among the first publications of the young pianist. Robert Schumann mentioned this work in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, in a famous and laudatory essay on young Chopin: "Hats off, gentlemen, a genius!"<sup>54</sup>

"*Là ci darem la mano*". *Varié, avec accompagnement d'Orchestre*, op. 2, was dedicated to a Mr. Titus Woyciechowski and comprises an ample Introduction, the theme inspired by Mozart's duettino and four brilliant variations:

Introduzione. *Largo*; Thema. *Allegretto*; Var. I *Brillante*; Var. II. *Veloce (ma accuratamente)*; Var. III *sempre sostenuto*; Var. IV. *Con bravura*; Var. *Adagio* sib; *Alla Polacca*

Chopin chose to end with a variation in Polish style, *Alla Polacca*, as a homage paid by a Polish patriot to the great Mozart. The rondo in Beethoven's *Triple Concerto* Op. 56 bears the same indication, and composers like Bach, Mozart, Schubert, Liszt, Mussorgsky, Tchaikovsky and Scriabin composed music to the typical rhythm of this solemn dance, in ternary meter.

The first of Chopin's preserved compositions is a *Polonaise* for piano, composed when he was seven years of age and published in the same year (1817). Educated at the High School of Music in Warsaw under composer Joseph Elsner's guidance, Chopin started his artistic career at the age of 19. The Polish press of that time wrote about his piano and composition skills that "fate has gifted Poles with Mr Chopin as Germans with Mozart".

Rimsky-Korsakov appreciated his talent as a melodist and as an „ingenious and original” harmonist.<sup>55</sup>

A brief presentation of Chopin's *Variations "Là ci darem la mano"* Op. 2 for piano and orchestra begins with:

- Introduzione. *Largo*; B flat major *piano*: the orchestral introduction begins with the Mozartian head of theme;
- The first eight bars are followed by a solo piano passage (23 bars) in typical Chopin style, with multiple melodic notes, virtuosic passages and a *pianissimo* ending;

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<sup>53</sup> *New Grove*, op. cit. vol. 5, p. 712.

<sup>54</sup> *Histoire de la Musique Occidentale*, Sous la direction de Jean & Brigitte Massin, Fayard, 2009, p. 768.

<sup>55</sup> *New Grove*, op. cit. vol. 5, p. 712.

- Poco più mosso marks the dialogue with the orchestra, followed by a solo passage ending in *pianissimo suspense* and *con forza e prestissimo* s'attacca il Thema, in festive march style:

Ex. nr. 1 Chopin:

**Allegretto.** ♩ = 48  
*semplice*  
*mezza voce*

*ten.*

*f*

*ten.*

*ten.*

*ten. leggero*

**Tutti.**

Fl.

Viol.

Corno.

In Chopin, the theme has no extensions

- the tempo is *Allegretto*, the key is B flat major, the time signature is 2/4

A (a+a<sub>1</sub>) 16 bars a(4+4) + a<sub>1</sub>(4+4); B 16 bars b(2+2+2+2) +a<sub>1v</sub>(4+4)

- each part ends with an orchestral *Tutti* with the Mozartian head of theme (a memento?), an 8-bar ritornello (4 +4) with the role of conclusion (flute – violin dialogue)

Var. I *Brillante marcato*: the theme is amplified, counterpointed with triplet figuration; finally, the 1<sup>st</sup> ritornello appears (varied, flute – clarinet dialogue)

Var. II *Veloce (ma accuratamente)*, theme ornamented with melodic 32<sup>nd</sup> notes, doubled at the octave;

- the score indicates an extra bass, in case the piece is performed without orchestral accompaniment

- in the end the 2<sup>nd</sup> ritornello (clarinet – flute dialogue)

Var. III *Sempre sostenuto*: dotted theme, march character, bass accompaniment – a perpetuum mobile in 32<sup>nd</sup> notes;

- 3<sup>rd</sup> ritornello (bassoon – horn dialogue in the low register)

Var. IV. *Con bravura sempre staccato e forte*, toccata character, followed by an amplified orchestral 4<sup>th</sup> ritornello (8+7 bars)

Var. V *Adagio espressivo*, B flat minor, A in *fortissimo*, with ample melodic passages (invoking Don Giovanni), followed by a phrase in *pianissimo* (Zerlina's retort)

- in section B – b starts with a *pianissimo possibile*, with ample passages of melodic notes (36<sup>th</sup> notes), the typical *rubato* turns into *stretto e con forza* (in a<sub>1v</sub>), then, suddenly, the soloist ends *piano delicato calando, smorzando* in *pianissimo*;

- the 5<sup>th</sup> ritornello grows into a magnificent *Alla Polacca* B flat major 3/4 (112 bars): the delicate Mozartian theme gains a heroic dimension and the specificity of the Polish dance; 4 introductory bars

A (a+a<sub>1</sub>) B extended b (4+3+2) +a<sub>1v</sub> and an ample CODA:

Ex. nr. 2 Chopin - *Alla Polacca*:

The image displays a musical score for Chopin's 'Alla Polacca'. The score is arranged in six systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) for the piano. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 96 (♩ = 96). The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The score includes various dynamics and performance instructions:

- System 1:** Features woodwind parts for Oboe (Ob.), Flute (Fl.), and Cello. The piano part begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The Cello part includes a *cresc.* (crescendo) marking.
- System 2:** The piano part starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic, followed by a forte (*f*) dynamic. There are markings for *Re.* (Rehearsal) and asterisks.
- System 3:** The piano part is marked *scherz.* (scherzo).
- System 4:** Continues the piano part with various dynamics and articulation.
- System 5:** The piano part features a forte (*f*) dynamic.
- System 6:** The piano part includes a *cresc.* (crescendo) marking and ends with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic.

♩=96.

Tutti. Fl.

Ob.

Cello *cresc.*

*f* *p* *f*

*schertz.*

*f*

*cresc.* *ff*

- the entire work is ingeniously varied: melodically, harmonically, rhythmically, dynamically, timbrally, defining an established style of a genius.

In February 1832, in Paris, the *Variations sur un thème de Don Juan* ended Chopin's first concert at the Pleyel Hall. The success of that evening established his reputation and since then the *Variations* have become a favourite concert piece for the great pianists.

### **1841 – Liszt – Fantasia *Réminiscences de "Don Juan"* for piano and orchestra<sup>56</sup>**

Testimonies about Liszt's interest in Mozart's music and especially in the fascinating character of Don Giovanni were recorded during his first concert tour in London (June 1824); at the invitation of King George IV at the Windsor Castle, the 12 years old pianist played for more than two hours, impressing the audience with his improvisation on the *Don Giovanni* minuet<sup>57</sup>.

Along with his original works – studies and character pieces – Liszt created arrangements that were considered paraphrases, transcriptions or reminiscences (*Réminiscence*), on more or less famous themes from the creations of contemporary composers. Usually, in a paraphrase, the composer can modify the original, giving his imagination free rein. Instead, the transcription is a faithful recreation of the original. Liszt's paraphrases on themes from operas by Mozart, Bellini, Donizetti and Verdi incorporate up to an entire act – in a 15-minute concert piece, by juxtaposing and combining the themes. These creations stand out among others of the genre and of the time, through their architectural value and rigor: "The finest of Liszt's opera fantasies ...juxtapose different parts of the opera in ways that bring out a new significance..." (Charles Rosen)<sup>58</sup>

The fantasie *Réminiscences de Don Juan* begins with the Commendatore's threat "Di rider finirai pria dell aurora! Ribaldo audace! Lascia a' morti la pace!" and continues with the duet between Don Giovanni–Zerlina for two variations, strictly observing the key, registers and rhythm.

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<sup>56</sup> In 1877, Liszt also published a version for two pianos.

<sup>57</sup> *New Grove*, op. cit. vol. 14, p. 767.

<sup>58</sup> Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*, p. 528 quoted by *New Grove*, op. cit., p. 767.

Ex. nr. 1 Liszt – *Duetto*

The image shows a musical score for Liszt's 'Duetto' in G major, Op. 11, No. 1. The score is in 2/4 time and consists of two systems. The first system is marked 'Andantino' and 'p e dolce'. The second system is marked 'parlando'. The score includes treble and bass staves with various musical notations such as notes, rests, and ornaments.

- after virtuosic passages typical of his style, Liszt takes the original ternary Coda and ends the thematic statement in *scherzando* and *fortissimo*: the soloist's fiendish technique suggests the shrewd and seductive game played by Don Giovanni, convinced of his victory;

Ex. nr. 2 Liszt:

A

new fantasia follows, this time on the champagne aria "Fin ch'han dal vino", after which the work concludes with the Commendatore's threats.

Composed following the 1838 version of the *Transcendental Studies*, the "Don Juan" *Fantasia* requires exceptional preparation and skills to solve the highly difficult technical problems, the triple chromatic passages, the extremely rapid tempo of execution and the

nimbleness in both hands required in the passages leaping wildly across the entire keyboard, which made Heinrich Neuhaus<sup>59</sup> say that "with the exception of Ginsburg<sup>60</sup>, probably nobody but the *pianola* played without smudges". Alexander Scriabin himself had problems with his right hand while over-practicing the "*Don Juan*" *Fantasia* and composed the funeral march of his first sonata, in memory of his injured hand.

## Conclusions

The playful, graceful and full of spirit character of the theme led to the most diverse approaches:

### Beethoven

- opts for the crusic, masculine (Don Giovanni), abbreviated (without repetition) and clear variant of the theme;
- removes the ternary CODA in 6/8 time from the statement of the theme, using instead a vivace Coda inspired from A, attached (with *atacca subito da Coda*) to the 8th and final variation (*Allegretto giocoso*);
- enables, throughout the eight variations, the highlighting of the virtuosity of each instrument;
- stands out through the masterly-written score and proves his solid knowledge in counterpoint (var. IV);
- does not avoid humour, rendered through the hoquetus writing in var. VII (*Allegretto scherzando*).

### Chopin

- delays the presentation of the theme with an ample Introduction (*Largo*), in 4/4 time, which states only the head of the theme, in dotted and rhythmically augmented form, as a solemn *Intrada*;
- uses the idea of A in the theme, but with dotted motif, renounces the extensions (Zerlina's melodic hesitations) and the ample ternary CODA, but introduces in the end, after the *Adagio espressivo* in the the 5<sup>th</sup> Variation, a grandiose *Alla Polacca* in typical ternary meter (3/4), the head of theme being the original anapestic one, not dotted;
- ends each variation with a typical orchestral *ritornello*, as a *thematic memento*;

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<sup>59</sup> disciple of Leopold Godowsky.

<sup>60</sup> Grigori Romanovici Ginzburg (1904 - 1961), Russian pianist.

- the piano score highlights the soloist's bravura and sensitivity.

Liszt

- uses several themes from the opera, not just the *duettino*;
- begins with the Commendatore's theme – *Grave*, 4/4, threatening *fortissimo*, in the key of the opera (D minor);
- provides a tonal preparation of the theme, with a seductive interlude, a *dolce teneramente Andantino* in A major;
- states the theme of the *duettino* in Andantino tempo *con grazia* (in Mozart the tempo was *Andante*);
- he is the only one who uses the original key of the original *duettino* (A major), and Don Giovanni's crusic-dactylic structure and Zerlina's anacrusic-dotted one, and who observes the register and order of entrances of the soloists.
- uses the Mozartian theme in its entirety, with subtle extensions suggesting Zerlina's indecision and procrastination, and implicitly the binary codetta and the ample, ternary coda;
- inserts long passages of melodic notes for the moments of suspense.

The three pieces presented, i.e. Beethoven – *Variationen über das Thema: "La ci darem la mano" aus Mozarts Don Juan*, Chopin – *"Là ci darem la mano". Varié, avec accompagnement d'Orchestre* and Liszt – *Réminiscences de "Don Juan"*, inspired by Mozart's famous *duettino* between Don Giovanni and Zerlina (there have been more throughout history), are, just like their model, genuine masterpieces that have transcended their time and entered the repertoire of the world's greatest soloists.

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